



**Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee on H.B. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor**

March 9, 2021

Co-Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Walker, Ranking Members Senator Miner and Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Rev. Carl McCluster, Senior Pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Bridgeport, where I have been ministering for more than 24 years, and co-founder of FaithActs for Education.

I am here on a matter of utmost urgency. I'm here to oppose H.B. 6439, the Governor Lamont's proposed education budget. I'm also asking you to modify the budget to align with S.B. 948, which is currently in the Education Committee.

By modifying the budget to align with SB 948, you will drive more resources to Black, Brown, and low-income students across all public schools and eliminate the phase-in that currently tells them they must wait for what we already know they deserve.

Two weeks ago, I, along with eight other Bridgeport clergy leaders, received my first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. We are committed to fight fear with faith and facts and to boldly rise up as a people to take back our lives.

This pandemic has disproportionately impacted our communities. At FaithActs, more than 200 of our people tested positive for COVID-19 throughout the pandemic. We've lost members across congregations. The loss, pain, and suffering our communities have experienced is immeasurable.

And yet, we aren't just dealing with one pandemic. My God! Our people are simultaneously struggling to survive the pandemic of racism and classism plaguing our communities and destroying our school system.

Freedom is the American Dream. And we know kids are not free if they cannot read. 75% of Bridgeport 3rd graders weren't reading on grade level before the pandemic. I can't imagine how many more have fallen even farther behind.

The pandemic really showed us that districts with the best resources were able to provide the best learning experiences for their children. The pandemic didn't cause these inequities, they just exacerbated them. So we can't pat ourselves on the back for providing schools with resources they already deserved before the pandemic.



I love this state with all my heart. But it pains me to know that, as a matter of public policy, Connecticut decides to focus its education dollars on affluent white kids and its incarceration dollars on low-income Black and Brown kids.

You have the power to change this. Will you invest in books or bars? Which is the better investment?

The definition of a vaccine is a substance used to stimulate the production of antibodies and provide immunity against one or several diseases. And as you fight to get our communities vaccinated against COVID-19 will you also fight to get the state of Connecticut vaccinated against racism and classism? Will you stimulate the production of additional dollars and investments to provide our children with the protection they need to not only live, but thrive.

Please modify the proposed budget to reflect the values of justice and equity in education.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership on this issue.

Pastor Carl McCluster  
10 E Bassett Lane  
Derby, CT 06418

Shiloh Baptist Church of Bridgeport, Inc.  
477 Broad Street  
Bridgeport, CT 06605

FaithActs for Education  
857 Post Road, Suite 310  
Fairfield, CT 06824